

## **AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS**

Please amend the claims so that they read as follows:

**Claims 1-13 (Cancelled)**

**Claim 14 (Previously Presented):** A method, according to claim 16, wherein:

said step of forming said laminate for magnetic data recording is at least one method selected from the group consisting of sputtering, ion plating, plasma CVD, and vacuum deposition.

**Claim 15 (Previously Presented):** A method, according to claim 14, wherein:

said step of forming said protective layer is a method selected from the group consisting of sputtering, ion plating, plasma CVD, and vacuum deposition.

Claim 16 (Previously Presented): A method for manufacturing a thin-film magnetic recording medium, comprising the steps of:

forming a laminate for magnetic data recording on a nonmagnetic substrate;

said step of forming being a dry process in a vacuum atmosphere;

forming a protective layer on said laminate;

said step of forming a protective layer being a dry process in a vacuum atmosphere;

plasma-etching a first surface of said protective layer;

said step of plasma-etching conducted immediately after forming the protective layer in a vacuum and in a process gas mixture comprising an inert gas, an oxygen gas, and a nitrogen gas and a gas selected from the group consisting of a chlorine gas and a fluorine gas;

conducting the steps of forming a laminate, forming a protective layer, and plasma-etching continuously; and

forming a lubricant layer on said first surface of said protective layer, whereby surface defects are minimized and surface quality is greatly improved.

Claim 17 (Cancelled)

Claim 18 (Original): A method according to claim 15 wherein:

said step of plasma-etching is conducted in a process gas mixture contain the process gas mixture of Ar, O<sub>2</sub>, and N<sub>2</sub> where the mixing ratio thereof is substantially 6: 1: 3.

Claims 19-20 (Cancelled)

Claim 21 (Currently Amended): A method for manufacturing a thin-film magnetic recording medium, comprising the steps of:

forming a laminate for magnetic data recording on a nonmagnetic substrate;

said step of forming being a dry process in a vacuum atmosphere;

forming a protective layer on said laminate;

said step of forming a protective layer being a dry process in a vacuum atmosphere;



Claim 25 (New): A method for manufacturing a thin-film magnetic recording medium,  
comprising the steps of:

forming a laminate for magnetic data recording on a nonmagnetic substrate;

said step of forming being a dry process in a vacuum atmosphere;

forming a protective layer on said laminate;

said step of forming a protective layer being a dry process in a vacuum atmosphere;

plasma-etching a first surface of said protective layer;

said step of plasma-etching conducted immediately after forming the protective layer in a vacuum and in a process gas mixture comprising an inert gas, an oxygen gas, and a nitrogen gas and a gas selected from the group consisting of a chlorine gas and a fluorine gas, wherein particles on the surface of the protective layer are removed to make a smooth surface;

conducting the steps of forming a laminate, forming a protective layer, and plasma-etching continuously; and

forming a lubricant layer on said first surface of said protective layer, whereby surface defects are minimized and surface quality is greatly improved.